

# Pennsylvania

# POLST

Pennsylvania Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment  
A Participating Program of National POLST

April 2020

## COVID-19

The professional and personal impact of COVID-19 on Pennsylvanians is extraordinary. Health care professionals (HCP) have responded with a deep commitment and resilience. Institutions have responded with useful education on how to avoid COVID-19 while providing services in acute and long-term care and in other facilities in the community. We are providing a list of website resources, some of which may be useful to you.



**The Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Hospital and Healthsystem Association** have developed Interim Pennsylvania Crisis Standards of Care for Pandemic Guidelines. "The purpose of this document is to guide the allocation of patient care resources during an overwhelming public health emergency of any kind when demand for services dramatically exceeds the supply of the resources needed".



**National POLST.** To help address questions about POLST during the coronavirus pandemic, the national office has provided material for health care professionals and facilities.

[Guidance for Completing POLST Forms in Crisis Standards of Care](#)

[COVID-19 Statement](#)

[Long Term Care Facility Guidance](#)



**Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC)** has made its toolkit resources and online courses publicly available. Most of the information is applicable to all types of medical practice. Some of the topics are:

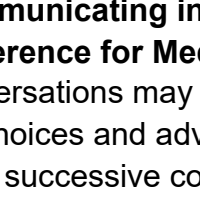
- Using Telehealth
- Public and Family Support
- Health Care Setting Specific Guidance.
- Communication Tips

<https://www.capc.org/toolkits/covid-19-response-resources/>



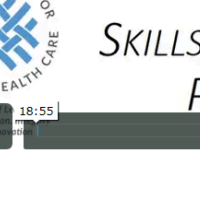
**VitalTalk.** COVID-Ready Communication Skills. This open source primer that gives practical advice on how to talk about difficult topics related to COVID-19, including specific phrasing for patient and family conversations.

<https://vitaltalk.org/guides/covid-19-communication-skills>



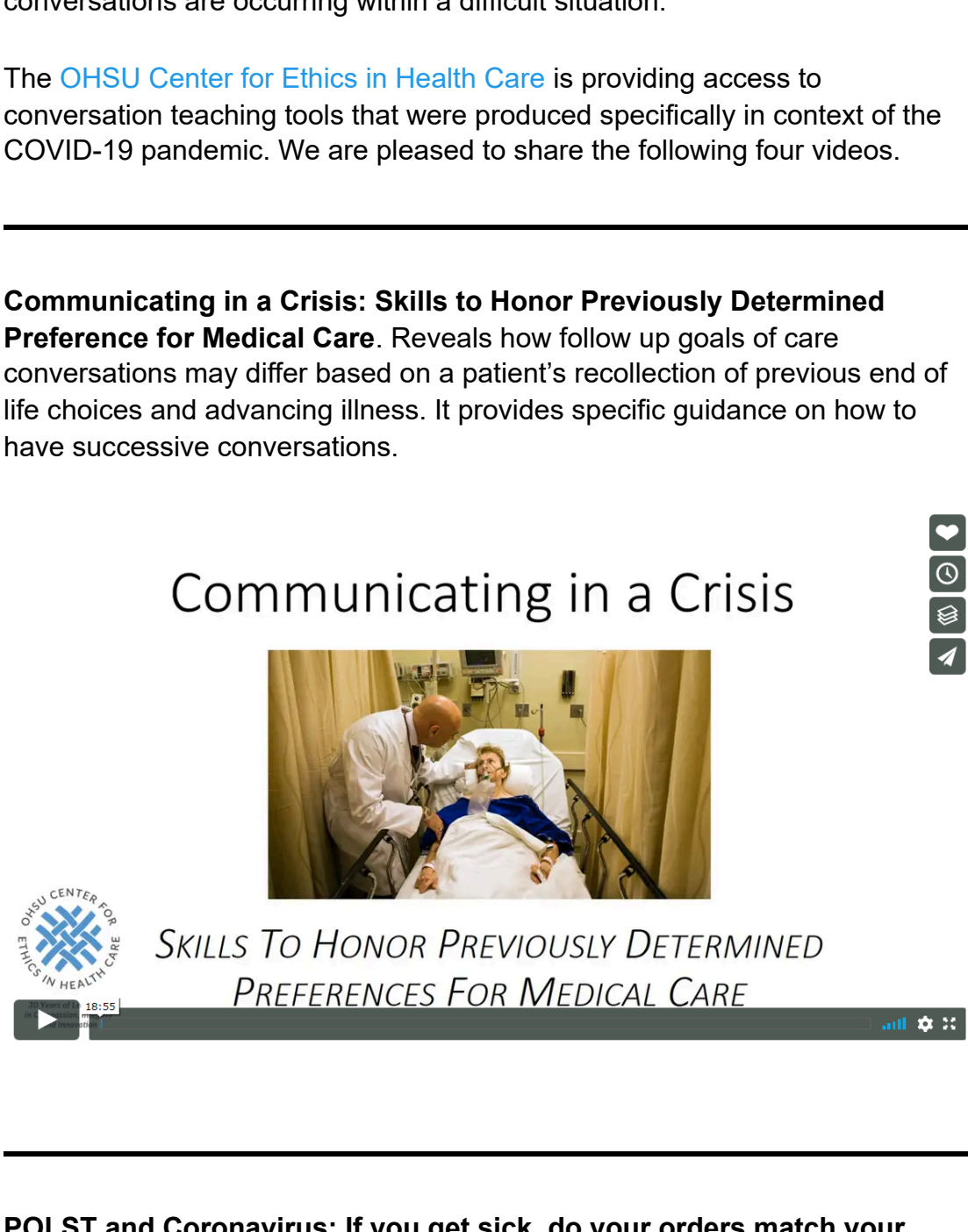
**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).** This comprehensive site offers the latest update on the number of cases within the country. Further it includes specific information for the public, resources for the community and detailed information for HCP and facilities.

<https://cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>



**AMDA.** This is a resource recommended for administration and staff of Pennsylvania long-term care facilities. Found at the side are daily updates, guidance, recommendations and tools along with pertinent podcasts and webcasts.

<https://paltc.org/COVID-19>



## The Communication Challenge

During this time that presents extraordinary challenges to health care professionals, patients and families, it is expected that more goals of care conversations are occurring within a difficult situation.

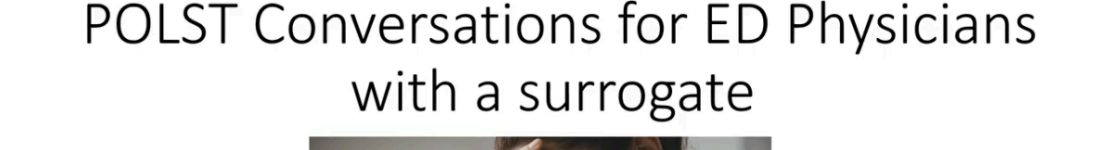
The [OHSU Center for Ethics in Health Care](#) is providing access to conversation teaching tools that were produced specifically in context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are pleased to share the following four videos.

**Communicating in a Crisis: Skills to Honor Previously Determined Preference for Medical Care.** Reveals how follow up goals of care conversations may differ based on a patient's recollection of previous end of life choices and advancing illness. It provides specific guidance on how to have successive conversations.

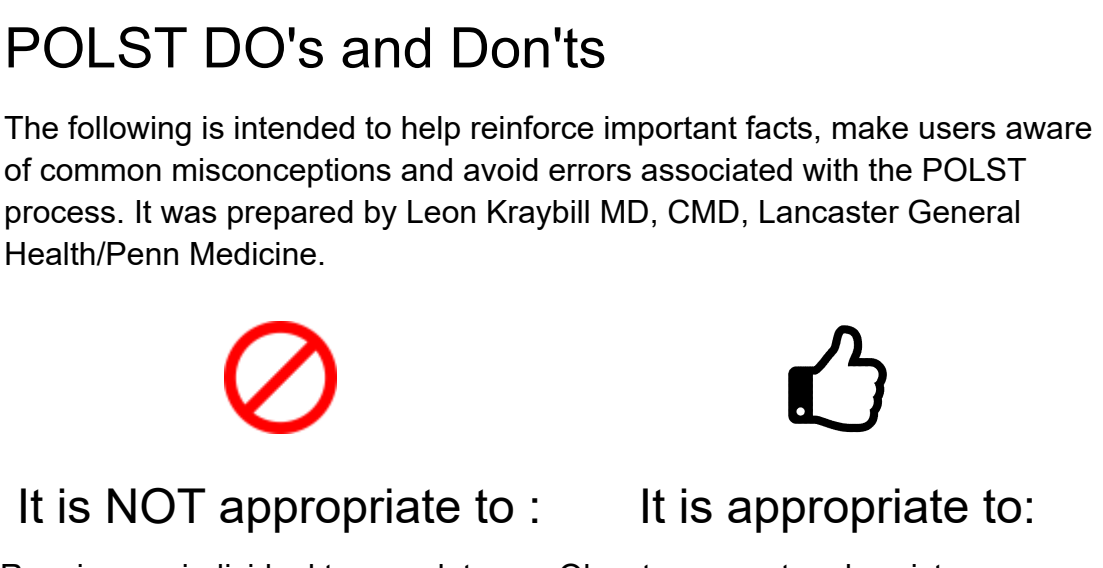
### Communicating in a Crisis



*SKILLS TO HONOR PREVIOUSLY DETERMINED PREFERENCES FOR MEDICAL CARE*

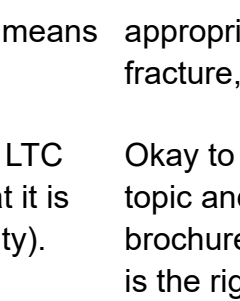


**POLST and Coronavirus: If you get sick, do your orders match your wishes?** Intended for patients and families of those who already have a POLST because of frailty or serious illness and are thus among the most likely not to survive if they get the coronavirus. It can help those with a preexisting POLST understand what their orders mean and encourages them to talk to their families. The goal is support patients' ability to plan ahead if they get sick and to be able to avoid hospitalization if that is their wish.

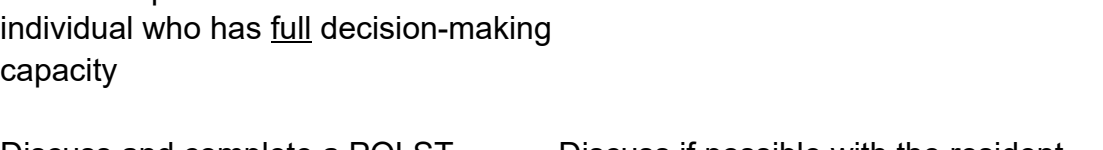


### POLST Conversation for ED Physicians with a Capable Patient.

#### POLST Conversations for ED Physicians with a Capable Patient



Katie Stowers, D.O.  
Ronald W. Ninko Director of Serious Illness Education  
Center for Ethics in Health Care  
Oregon Health & Science University



### POLST Conversation for ED Physicians with a Surrogate.

#### POLST Conversations for ED Physicians with a surrogate

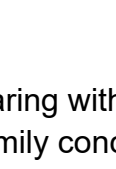
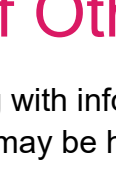


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## POLST DO's and Don'ts

The following is intended to help reinforce important facts, make users aware of common misconceptions and avoid errors associated with the POLST process. It was prepared by Leon Kraybill MD, CMD, Lancaster General Health/Penn Medicine.



It is **NOT** appropriate to :

It is **appropriate** to:

**Require** any individual to complete a POLST

Okay to suggest and assist

Establish a facility policy to **require** POLST completion for all residents

Okay to offer to all appropriate residents

**Incentivize** medical providers based on POLST completion or counting

Okay to incentivize advance care planning discussions and documentation

**Confuse** "cardiac arrest" with "respiratory arrest" in a patient with "DNR but FULL medical intervention"

Ventilation support may still be desired by the individual who is not in full cardiac arrest

**Assume** that a "DNR, comfort measures only" choice always means no hospitalization

Interventions for comfort are still appropriate. Examples: injuries like hip fracture, or lacerations

**Include** the POLST form in the LTC admission packet (conveys that it is just a paper completion formality).

Okay to provide introductions to the topic and subsequent conversations – brochures, videos like "POLST: When is the right time" or "Understanding POLST"

Discuss and complete a POLST document only with the HCPOA/representative of an individual who has full decision-making capacity

The HCPOA/representative may be included, with the permission of the resident.

Discuss and complete a POLST document only with an individual with limited or no decision-making capacity

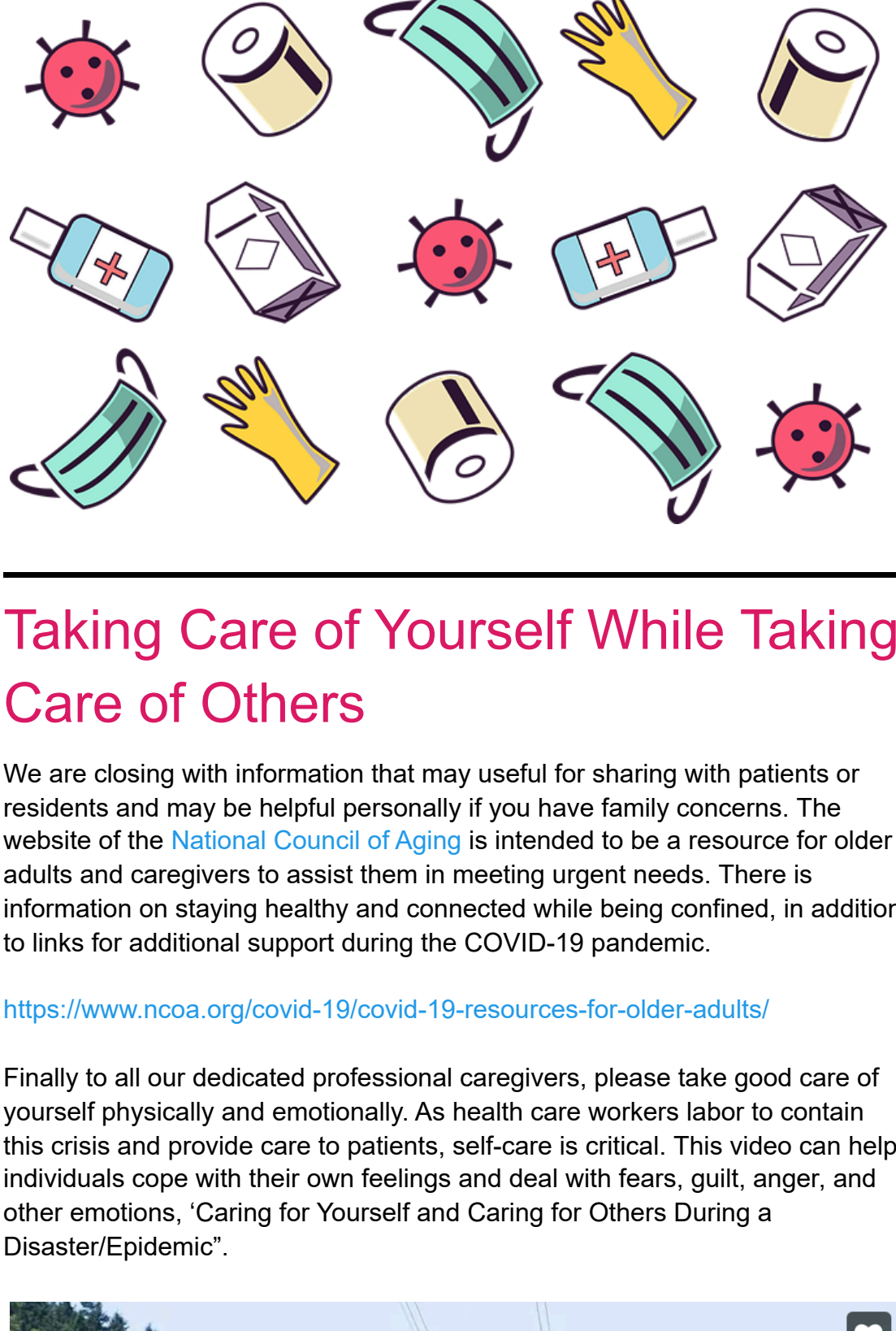
Discuss if possible with the resident but confirm choices with HCPOA/representative

**Assume** that an individual with advanced or irreversible or terminal illness will choose a "DNR" status

Okay to inquire about their understanding of their illnesses, the ability to improve, and the likely benefit of medical intervention

**Assume** that POLST choices will stay the same

POLST is a guide based on decisions at a particular point. When time and medical circumstances allow, it should always be confirmed during subsequent medical changes



## Taking Care of Yourself While Taking Care of Others

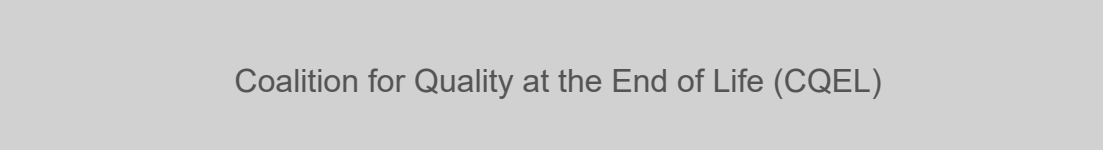
We are closing with information that may be useful for sharing with patients or residents and may be helpful personally if you have family concerns. The website of the [National Council of Aging](#) is intended to be a resource for older adults and caregivers to assist them in meeting urgent needs. There is information on staying healthy and connected while being confined, in addition to links for additional support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<https://www.ncoa.org/covid-19/covid-19-resources-for-older-adults/>

Finally to all our dedicated professional caregivers, please take good care of yourself physically and emotionally. As health care workers labor to contain this crisis and provide care to patients, self-care is critical. This video can help individuals cope with their own feelings and deal with fears, guilt, anger, and other emotions. "Caring for Yourself and Caring for Others During a Disaster/Epidemic".



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Senior Scholar- Center for Ethics, OHSU



Thank you for your continuing support of POLST. Information is available by contacting [PAPOLST@verizon.net](mailto:PAPOLST@verizon.net) or at the following websites.

[www.papolst.org](http://www.papolst.org)

[www.upmc.com/services/aginginstitute/partnerships-and-collaborations/polst](http://www.upmc.com/services/aginginstitute/partnerships-and-collaborations/polst)

## Thank you for your continuing support of POLST.

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